



**March 1, 2011 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Joint Committee on Human Services**

**Committee Bill No. 5434:
AN ACT CONCERNING PROCESSING OF
SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members:

I am James H. Gatling, Ph.D., President/CEO of New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI); Board Chairman of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFA); and a member of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council. I am providing this testimony in support of Committee Bill No. 5434: AN ACT CONCERNING PROCESSING OF SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS.

As many of you are aware, CAFA is the state association for Connecticut's twelve Community Action Agencies (CAAs). These are the not-for-profit agencies designated by the state and federal governments as their official partners in helping families to avoid financial crisis, and empowering them with job training, child care, and other vital supports to regain their financial footing if they do experience poverty. We administer benefit programs to more than 300,000 people annually, empowering families and strengthening communities in every Connecticut city and town.

Just last week, the members of this committee and the Appropriations Committee held a forum in which regional officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Food and Nutrition Service described the need for improvement in the State's administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and what may happen if the situation is not improved.

Committee Bill 5434 addresses things we can do right away. Connecticut's CAAs are eager to partner with the State Department of Social Services to broaden SNAP outreach and enrollment so that families facing especially difficult times gain more appropriate access to services that help them get back on their feet.

During the 2009-2010 energy season, we provided energy assistance to more than 161,000 people who also were eligible for SNAP, yet were not enrolled. We are a local, flexible, accountable infrastructure, and we are committed to improving our state's economic outlook. Leveraging federal dollars to provide a vital service and help people rejoin the economy makes sense fiscally and socially as we work together to shape a better future for *all* Connecticut families.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to take your questions.